DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 696 CG 022 275

TITLE Help at Home for Learning in School.
INSTITUTION New Jersey State Dept. of Education, Trenton. Div. of General Academic Education.
REPORT NO NJSDE-PTM-500.44
PUB DATE Oct 86
NOTE 41p.
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; *Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; Intervention; *Parent Child Relationship; Parent Participation; Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; *Secondary School Students

ABSTRACT

This booklet has been prepared primarily to assist parents as they strive to be active partners with the school in the education of their children. It is designed to provide information and practical suggestions on how this teamwork can be accomplished. The introduction cautions parents that, when noting the characteristics of a particular age group, they should keep in mind that each child is unique, even within his or her own family. It is emphasized that this booklet contains general guidelines for parents and that children grow and develop at individual rates. The guide is divided into five major units: (1) early elementary; (2) middle elementary; (3) later elementary; (4) junior high; and (5) senior high. Each unit contains descriptions of general characteristics and typical behaviors of that age group; what shool is like for the child at that age; and some ways in which parents can actively involve themselves in school activities, thereby learning more about the school and building rapport with the school staff. In addition, a final section is devoted to some issues and strategies important to parents of children of any age. The booklet concludes that the goal of raising a healthy, happy, well-educated child is one shared by educators and parents. Resources for further information are listed. (ABL)

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HELP AT HOME FOR LEARNING IN SCHOOL

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Commissioner of Education

Division of General Academic Education
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New Jersey State Department of Education
225 West State Street, CN 500
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October, 1986

PTM NO. 500.44

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FOREWORD

The New Jersey State Department of Education is committed to equipping all students with the academic skills they will need to lead independent, productive lives. In keeping with this commitment, we have raised academic standards for all students and instituted a rigorous new high school graduation test called the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT). Students must pass the test to receive a high school diploma. Because the HSPT is more difficult than its predecessor, helping students meet the new standards presents a challenge that cannot be met by any one group alone. It will take the sustained and united efforts of educators, parents, school boards, and the students themselves, all working in partnership.

This booklet has been developed to assist parents who strive to improve the home academic environment and their children's basic skills. The National Commission on Excellence in Education Report, A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, defines the parent's role this way::

> You must be a living example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education. You should encourage more diligent study and discourage satisfaction with mediocrity and the attitude that says "let it slide;" monitor your child's study; encourage good study habits; encourage your child to take more demanding rather than less demanding courses; nurture ...curiosity, creativity, and confidence; and be an active participant in the work of the schools...

Since children look to their parents and teachers as models, parents set a powerful example for children by showing a commitment to continued learning in their own lives. They help their children understand that excellence in education cannot be achieved without intellectual and moral integrity that is coupled with hard work and commitment.

Parents, as well as other community members, must take an active interest in their schools. They must attend board meetings. They must hold the board and the education staff accountable for creating an academic climate in the school and for ensuring that courses of study are accurate, coordinated, and taught as written. Parents and community members must also insist on open, public discussion of district and school-wide student scores and plans to improve student performance.

Our educational system will improve only when the school, home, and community work in total cooperation.

Saul Cooperman
Commissioner

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The principal authors of this publicaton were Ms. Carmen Jimenez and Dr. Judith Lawrence, school improvement specialists, New York City Board of Education, who served as private consultants to the New Jersey Department of Education.

Particular acknowledgment is extended to Dr. Jacqueline Cusack, manager, Bureau of Student Behavior and Development, and Dr. Tynette W. Hills, coordinator, student motivation, both from the Division of General Academic Education, who provided leadership in the development of the document. A special note of gratitude is expressed to Jean Socolowski, President of the New Jersey Congress of Parents and Teachers, for comments and suggestions.

For their many helpful suggestions concerning the organization and content, special thanks are also extended to the following staff members of the New Jersey Department of Education:

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INTRODUCTION

Your child's first classroom is your home; and, as parents, you are not only the first, but also the most important of all the teachers. Even though children spend more than 15,000 hours in school, their home experiences are extremely crucial to them as learners.

Your critical role as parents begins with satisfying the basic physical and emotional needs of your children. Building on this, you communicate to them a sense of belonging and worth. These early experiences at home set the direction for future learning at school, especially when they provide children with opportunities to plan, express themselves, take risks, negotiate, reflect, organize, and investigate. When these skills, as well as many others, are introduced by parents, taught at school, and then reinforced further at home, the school and the parents work as a team; and in this way, learning is enhanced.

Schooling is an experience that combines rights and respect with responsibility--all of which are shared by educators, students, and parents. School gives children a chance to apply and extend what they have learned from their home experiences. Administrators and teachers, on the other hand, are trained to provide their students with the best educational experiences possible. They are committed both to respect for the individual child and to their responsibility of preparing students to be responsible, competent members of society.

Students at any age have the right to a learning environment that responds to all aspects of their being--intellectual, social, emotional, and physical. They, in turn, have the responsibility to apply their best effort and all their personal tools to the educational task. As they grow and mature, students should become more responsible for monitoring, directing, and evaluating their own learning, but at all ages, the children are expected to show respect for the school staff and for fellow students.

This booklet has been prepared primarily to assist parents as they strive to be active partners with the school in the education of their children. It is designed to provide information and practical suggestions on how this teamwork can be accomplished.

The guide is divided into five major units: 1) early elementary, 2) middle elementary, 3) later elementary, 4) junior high, and 5) senior high. Each unit contains descriptions of general characteristics and typical behaviors of that age group, what school is like for the child at that age, and some ways in which parents can actively involve themselves in school activities and thereby learn more about the school, as well as build rapport with the school staff. In addition, a final section is devoted to some issues and strategies important to parents of children of any age.

When noting the characteristics of a particular age group, keep in mind that each child is unique, even within his own family. In addition, there is overlapping of characteristics among age groups and much variation within any particular group. This booklet contains, then, general guidelines for parents. Remember, children grow and develop at individual rates.

Educators and parents share a common goal--a healthy, happy, well-educated child. Working in partnership, educators and parents can help each child achieve this goal.

EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL YEARS: GRADES K-2

This group generally includes children five to seven years of age. At this stage, children are very perceptive and responsive to their environment, quickly acquiring and mastering skills in many areas. Since their learning is primarily by doing, touching, smelling, tasting, and hearing, they need experiences that require extensive use of their senses. Interestingly, children of this age group learn to solve problems long before they can explain solutions. The changes experienced in the physical, intellectual, and social realms prepare them for developing self-identity and adapting to life outside the home--primarily at school.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

During this stage, children continue to develop facility in language and to increase their vocabularies. The child in kindergarten may be able to identify and write some letters and words, as well as recognize numbers and perhaps count in sequence. In addition, many can recognize and identify colors, shapes, and sizes. Experiences in first and second grade engage children in activities that further develop reading skills, extend language, expand vocabulary, and enhance abilities to manipulate numbers. Young children learn most efficiently when they are actively involved in multi-sensory activities.

As children move through these early elementary school years, they develop a better understanding of time, sequence, and distance. For example, young children realize that Monday is at the beginning and Friday at the end of the school week.

Early elementary school activities provide many opportunities for the child to organize, order, and investigate (weather charts; classroom job charts; cooking; and simple science experiments, such as growing plants, observing animals, etc.). The work is often very repetitive and oriented to the senses. Most children during these years feel comfortable when they know what to expect. Schedules and routines, such as reading time, clean-up, lunch, and study time, are designed to help children feel more secure at school. In addition, school work emphasizes listening, following directions, recalling details, and initiating and completing projects.

Children moving through this developmental stage often demonstrate considerable interest in nature and science, e.g., plants, animals, and space. The school curriculum is designed to promote these interests, as well as to provide needed practice and reinforcement in the basic skills of reading, math, and writing.

Homework emphasizes the concepts and ideas presented in class, the further development of skills through practice and repetition, and the completion of easy projects. These assignments help the child acquire independence and a sense of success, accomplishment, and responsibility. A typical homework assignment might include a practice sheet with mathematics problems for reinforcing certain concepts or a reading lesson from a library book.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Children in the early elementary school years experience many social and emotional changes. Generally, they begin this stage eager to carry out some responsibility. They have a strong sense of possession and do not like to share, but will do so in order to please adults. Since children tend to seek approval and praise from adults who are important to them, they will make an effort to please. Even at this young age, however, they can be sensitized to the concept that neither adults nor peers have to be pleased at the expense of personal values.

Moving closer to the end of this stage, children begin to form relationships with peers. They become more independent and better able to make choices and to complete simple projects. Some children may become assertive, aggressive, self-centered, demanding, competitive, and boastful. This may be expressed in a wish to always be first in line or a demand to have the undivided attention of a parent or teacher.

Many school activities are designed to help children develop good social skills. Teachers provide opportunities that require children to share or work cooperatively with peers in large and small groups. Acceptable behaviors may be rewarded with tokens, such as stars, special certificates, privileges, or praise.

Fears are very real to the early elementary school child and should be taken seriously and respected. Often this fear is of losing a parent and is most evident when the child enters school, but occasionally the fear is of rejection by other children. Some children go through this period with minimal trauma; others act out through tantrums or withdrawal. Fears also may surface in aggressive behavior, silliness, and even in the development of suspect headaches or stomachaches. Teachers and parents, must work together to find the source of the fears and to alleviate them.

By the time children reach the end of this stage of development, they may be showing more willingness to listen to others and to share ideas. Many can initiate, plan, and complete projects. They may be sensitive about the reactions of others or afraid of criticism, and they usually respond best to indirect correction. They enjoy realistic dramatic play, tall tales, and humor.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Between the ages of five and seven, children experience many physical changes. They slowly gain control over both large and small muscles. In many cases, handedness may have been established. They usually can run, jump, hop, climb, and even walk a straight line. They gradually are gaining independence in activities, such as eating, using the bathroom, and dressing.

School activities, such as games, outdoor play, self-serve lunch, and putting on and taking off outerwear, help develop large muscles. Small muscle development and better coordination enables the children to perform some writing and perhaps tie shoes. Teachers encourage the children to handle writing instruments, crayons, paint brushes, etc.

Upon entering school, many children come into contact with a group of other children for the first time. At the beginning of this stage, they are more susceptible to colds and childhood diseases and, thus, may frequently be absent from school. By the end of this stage, however, they develop better resistance.

Moving through this phase, children often exhibit strong likes and dislikes for certain foods. One of the goals of the lunch program in school is to provide children with nutritious, balanced meals that at the same time introduce them to different foods.

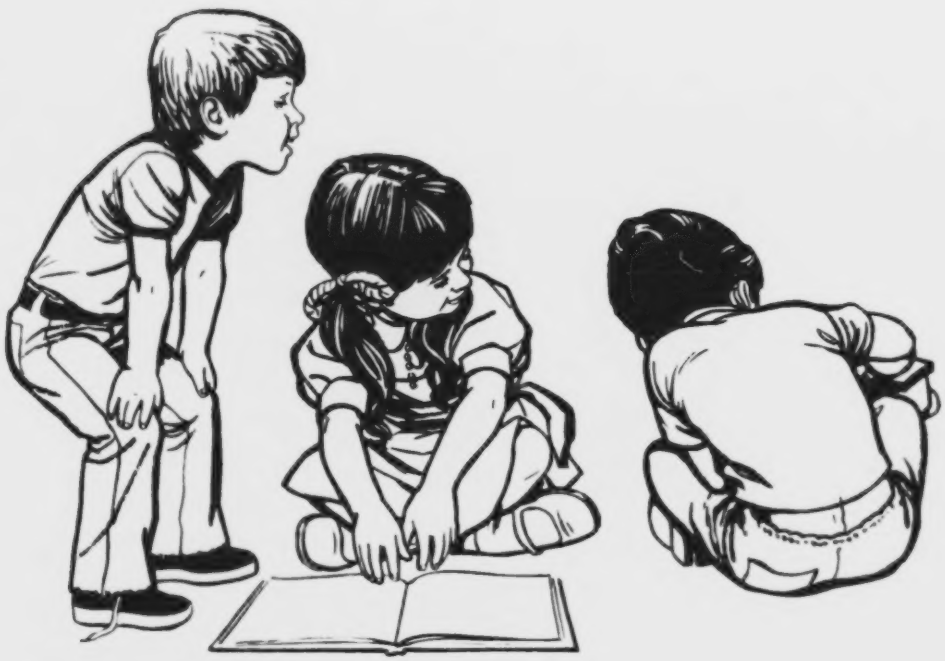
THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- For most of the school day, children are engaged in activities that develop language, build vocabulary, or develop the ability to recognize and manipulate numbers.

- Children are expected to listen, follow directions, recognize and use written symbols, and recall and evaluate information.

- Homework emphasizes the reinforcement of concepts and ideas presented in class, the development of skills through practice and repetition, and the completion of easy projects. Find out from the teacher how often and how much homework to expect. Ask your child if there is work that needs to be done at home. It is important that you provide a quiet area, lighted and equipped for work. Be available for assistance, but be careful that you don't become overly involved!

- School provides children with many opportunities to share or work cooperatively with others. Teams or groups may be formed to accomplish certain activities.



PARENTS CAN HELP

There are many ways that you can be effective partners with the school. One strategy is to stay involved in school activities throughout all of your child's school years, joining parent organizations, for example; but helping your child master and reinforce some of the skills learned in school is an equally important strategy.

Mathematics

- Ask your child to identify numbers on displayed items when shopping. Older children can add the cost of items and even calculate change. If possible, give them an opportunity to purchase items. Demonstrate how to use ads and compare prices. This provides practice in computing skills and problem-solving.

- Allow your child to help prepare meals. This activity is a wonderful way to learn about measuring, following directions, and cause and effect.

- Make references to time within the context of your child's own schedule. For example, when it is time to get up, say: "It is seven o'clock--time to get up."

Language, Reading, Writing

- Read to your child daily. After reading, ask questions about the story. Give older children an opportunity to read to you; and, of course, let your child observe you reading for both information and pleasure.

- Visit the library with your child at least once a week, if possible. Help him/her to develop skills in using its resources.

- Talk to your child often. Speak clearly and slowly so that your child can learn correct pronunciation and practice listening skills. Urge your child to express a complete thought when speaking. For example, "See the dog run," instead of "Dog run.".

- Listen with interest to what your child is saying. Look at your child when he/she is speaking, ask questions, and encourage your child to express opinions.

- Keep magazines and newspapers in the home so that your child will become familiar with a variety of sources for reading pleasure, as well as for information.

- Provide your child with models to build, e.g., cars, airplanes. In this way, your child can practice moving from abstract ideas to a concrete product.

- Encourage your child's writing projects. List making develops concepts for organizing ideas, letter writing helps build communicaton skills, and making books of original stories and poems instills a sense of competency in young writers.

- Have your child read and then explain the rules of a game.

- Whenever possible illustrate concepts, such as big/little, tall/short, narrow/wide, etc.

Besides supporting the schools through home activities that reinforce academic learning, parents also act as partners with educators when they respond promptly and courteously to school communications. Referring to the school in a positive manner also models for your child the importance of the school.

MIDDLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL YEARS: GRADES 3-4

This stage generally includes children eight to nine years old. The period is characterized by a slow and steady physical growth, with heightened social relationships and a growing awareness of self and others. During this time, children usually establish their own way of using basic skills in language arts and mathematics. They are better able to define problems and test ideas by weighing facts, using judgment, and developing more logical patterns of problem solving. They can distinguish fact from fiction and are beginning to develop a broader understanding of time and space.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

During these years, children experience definite growth in their abilities to think and make judgments. They show interest in perfecting their skills and sometimes will do the same task over and over again.

In school, children are working on mastering basic skills in all areas, with a special emphasis on reading and math. These experiences are structured to help children become independent learners. In general, during these grades, schools focus on developing children's skills and on initiating and sustaining their interest in school work. Activities are designed to assist children in developing and mastering the skills to follow complicated directions, use complex criteria for making selections, extend and integrate information from various sources, and verify information through investigation.

In the classroom, your child may be working on a unit of study in science or social studies that has many sections and takes several weeks to complete. The work may require reading, following directions with many steps, performing experiments, and locating resources. This type of activity helps develop skills in planning, organizing, and seeing a task through to completion. Teachers increasingly will expect your child to be independent, self-initiated, and self-motivated in learning activities.

As children move through this stage, they tend to be interested in identifying and classifying objects. They like to make plans and are developing some capacity for budgeting time. School assignments vary from short-term practice and repetition in a given area (multiplication tables, cursive writing) to more long-term projects that may require them to use outside resources, references, and facilities (museums, libraries, newspapers). Interest in special fields, such as sports, science, and the arts, may also emerge during this age.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Children of eight and nine may begin to indicate a preference for working and playing with others more frequently. They are beginning to identify with group responsibilities and purposes, showing an enthusiasm for group and club activities. Schools often provide extracurricular activities that complement the child's emerging interests in clubs and hobbies, such as music, dance, sports, computers, etc.

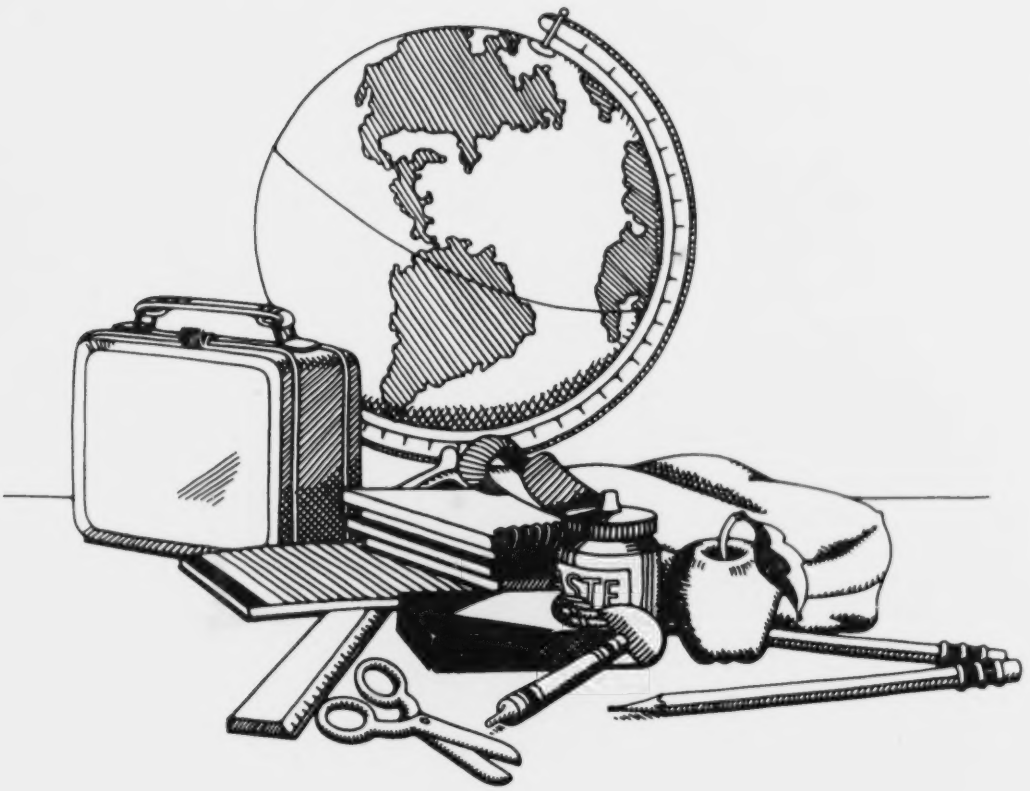
Children of this age group tend to be more selective about their friends. Peers begin to influence their activities, dress, and behaviors; and their choice of clothes, for example, may be determined by what the group is wearing. Although children of the middle elementary school years are frequently alert, friendly, and interested in people, they also can be careless, noisy, and argumentative. Self-confidence, eagerness, and enthusiasm may lead them to attempt activities that are beyond their capacity.

These children are likely to exhibit increased ability to evaluate self and others. They tend to have a strong sense of right and wrong and may become interested in punishment, privileges, and rules. They may, at times, be outspoken and critical of adults.

Teachers structure learning activities that encourage children to make evaluations and choices based on certain criteria. This might include student government organizations, school newspapers, and classroom discussions about rules and codes of discipline.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

These children are still growing at a slow but steady rate. Interest grows in games, such as marbles, catching with one hand, or building with small blocks that require small muscles. Fine muscle work such as writing, however, may still be difficult. By the end of this stage, girls are usually ahead of boys in terms of physical growth.



THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- While mastering basic skills in all areas, children are involved in experiences which help them become independent learners.
- The school expects your child to become more independent, self-initiated, and self-motivated.
- Homework may be a combination of practice and repetition along with more long-term projects requiring outside references and resources, such as a dictionary, an atlas, or a set of encyclopedias.
- Extracurricular activities complement emerging interests.
- Involvement in the peer group is increasing.

PARENTS CAN HELP

A most important contribution is to remain involved throughout your child's entire school experience, both by participating in parent organizations and by showing your child how interested you are in the classroom and extracurricular activities.

- Attend plays and other performances given by the children. This communicates your interest and pride in your child's work.

- Communicate once a week with your child's teacher so that you can keep up-to-date on your child's progress.

- Review your child's books and homework daily so that you can be aware of both strengths and weaknesses in his/her work.

- Talk with your child and challenge him/her to think, to evaluate situations, and to make decisions. For example, you might discuss local or national events.

- Encourage your child's special interests and talents. Local organizations, such as the Scouts, the "Y", and Little League, provide supervised experiences.

- Provide opportunities for your child to explore and learn about the community (museums, cultural attractions, libraries).

- Identify a time and a specific area for reading which, like the homework area, is well-lighted and free of distraction.

- Look for opportunities around the house for your child to practice academic skills:

  Mathematics: Ask your child to divide a cake or pie; to measure soap, a room, or ingredients for a recipe. Have him/her count and add laundry items, such as socks or shirts.

  Reading: Ask your child to read and then explain the directions from a recipe or a game. Let him/her use maps to plan trips. Encourage use of the telephone book. Use newspapers (headlines, comic strips, classified ads, grocery ads) to extend vocabulary and to give practice in comprehension.

  Science: Provide children with the opportunity to care for plants or small animals. Let them consult a thermometer and then determine proper clothing for the day. Encourage your child to question and explore how things work.

  Social Studies: Discuss local, national, and international current events with your child. Encourage the reading of newspapers and magazines. Stretch your child's mind by discussing political events and differences among various cultures.

LATER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL YEARS: GRADES 5-6

Grades five and six generally include children who are ten and eleven years old. Wide variations in physical maturity characterize this period. Girls are more mature than boys by about two years, and thus they tend to be larger and stronger. As a result of rapid and uneven muscular and skeletal growth, awkwardness and restlessness are common at this stage. Marked physical changes may affect children's energy, causing them to tire easily.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

As children move through grades five and six, they are better able to discuss problems and understand the different sides of questions. They demonstrate greater objectivity in judgment and an interest in other people's ideas and feelings. Their insights are becoming more mature, and they may have a greater capacity to accept criticism. Their ability to reason increases steadily, showing good understanding of complex ideas; and they are capable of being absorbed in manipulative, constructive, and experimental activities for very long periods of time.

Schoolwork moves into a greater emphasis on higher and more abstract levels of learning. Children may be asked to read passages and react to the ideas presented, rather than deal just with the facts. Much of the work also focuses on applying skills to situations that reflect real needs in the world at large. Students are expected to work independently, sometimes following complex directions that require more refined research skills, such as the selection and integration of significant information from several sources. The need for organized study methods to accomplish these tasks cannot be overstated.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Children during this stage are eager for group approval and belonging. Loyalties are strong, and hero worship is common. There may be a great desire to show off and to receive acclaim from peers. Fifth and sixth graders frequently demonstrate a keen sense of humor through practical jokes. By the time they reach sixth grade, children usually have developed strong allies among their peers. Similarity of interests and age influence their choice of friends. As puberty approaches, certain children may desire to be alone more and may begin to show some shyness. Children at this age also may show anger more frequently and grow more critical of parents or teachers. While they may tease and quarrel with siblings one moment, at other times they are very protective.

Teachers increasingly give fifth and sixth graders opportunities to handle responsibilities and act in a mature and self-disciplined manner. Students may take leadership for school-wide activities, such as holiday parties, a field day, student newspaper, etc.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Children in this pre-adolescent period are experiencing many physical changes, such as uneven and rapid growth patterns. Hormonal changes, which signal the beginning of puberty, trigger the development of facial hair for boys and the enlargement of breasts for girls.

THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- Basic skills should be mastered. Classroom work focuses attention increasingly on learning in the content areas, such as social studies and science.
- Most of the school work must be done independently, utilizing higher and more abstract levels of thinking.
- There may be more opportunity for group activities at school, such as student government, sports, clubs, etc.
- Children are expected to show mature, self-disciplined behavior more frequently.

PARENTS CAN HELP

- Review your child's work on a daily basis. Discuss assignments, check for understanding and comprehension, and determine if there are additional resources needed in order to complete the work.

- Communicate with the school regularly. Respond to requests from the school and attend school meetings. This involvement signals to your child that even though he/she is becoming more mature and working more independently, you are still an important part of the schooling process. By investing in relationships with teachers and other parents, you are able to gain insight into your child's academic progress, as well as to better understand his/her friends and relationships outside the home.

- Give your child responsibilities at home (chores, errands, small jobs). Make sure that the job fits the child's capabilities. Taking these responsibilities helps your child develop independence and self-discipline. Be sure to show appreciation in some special way for a job well done .

- At some quiet, relaxed time, ask your child about school. Choose a time when you have an opportunity to listen and your child is most likely to feel like talking.

- Provide opportunities for your child to participate in activities that extend special interests or talents--sports, music, clubs, etc.

- Set limits that are reasonable, flexible, and fair so that your child is aware of the behavior expected not only at school, but at home.

- Give your child many opportunities to engage in dialogue about abstract ideas, opinions, and values. Express your own opinions, and encourage your child to do the same.

- Take your child to a local political event, such as a hearing or a debate so he/she can see the democratic process at work.

- Should you need help with problems that arise, school guidance counselors, community health agencies, physicians, and your local church or synagogue are sources of assistance.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS: GRADES 7-9

Early adolescence generally is thought to begin with puberty. The onset usually is earlier for girls, approximately ages 10-13; while for boys, that age range is 12 to 15. Puberty is a major biological event in human development that has profound implications for the child socially, as well as physically. Not since infancy have so many changes taken place, and now your child has awareness and reflection about these changes. These new experiences, both physical and psychological, contribute to the teen's demonstrating a lot of contradiction, confusion, conflict, and inconsistency.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

It is likely that during adolescence your child is making a transition from an elementary school to middle school or junior high school. These can be very difficult school days for your child. The school may now be larger and more distant from the home. What is more, students in junior and senior high usually have more than one teacher and thus must learn to adjust to different teaching styles and levels of expectation in regard to both behavior and academics. Assignments tend to be long-term, rather than overnight; so students are expected to budget their time accordingly and take more responsibility for monitoring their own progress.

The young teen is developing increasing sophistication in handling abstract concepts and generalizations about the world; and there is more frequent assertion of individual ideas about things, such as politics and religion. The school expects students of this age to express their ideas more often in writing; and this expression will frequently include abstract ideas, opinions, and individual analysis.

These adolescents begin to examine their own values, as well as those of their family and the school. They may develop strong feelings about moral and social issues, such as war or racism, and appear uncompromising about issues of justice. For example, if a teacher or parent makes an exception for one person and not for another, the teen may become very upset.

Schools for the young adolescent are designed to be supportive of the teen's needs for exploration and practice in decision making. There is increasing flexibility in the choice of courses of study and perhaps even the hours of school attendance. It is important that the student understand that greater freedom should be accompanied by increased self-discipline. The school expects regular attendance, punctuality, and the completion of assignments. Respect for the property and the rights of others is fundamental and non-negotiable in a school community.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Psychologically, early adolescence is characterized by the striving for independence, a detachment from dependence on parents. Teenagers want and need to "cut the apron strings." While they may attempt to achieve independence and gain the status and acceptance of adults, they may at the same time behave very childishly. Are they adults or children? They are struggling with that very question themselves. The 14-year-old girl who fights with her younger sister in the morning may spend the afternoon planning a debate on nuclear energy. A bundle of contrasts!

For the early adolescent, acceptance by the peer group is paramount. The most influential people are likely to be friends of either sex or adults outside the home. Conflict with parents, teachers, and siblings may increase; and old relationships may be abandoned for new ones. Influenced by the peer group, the adolescent strives for recognition as an individual and, consequently, may express his/her individuality through make-up, dress, hair, music, room decoration, etc. Questioning, rebelling, and searching are normal during this chaotic period as the child seeks opportunities to test different roles or aspects of personality. In order to do this, however, the teenager needs the psychological space necessary to experiment safely with new ways of thinking and behaving. It is important, therefore, that the home and the school provide limits that are reasonable and fair so that there will be balance between independence and support.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Children vary a great deal in the onset and the speed with which they experience the biological changes of puberty. It is very important that you provide them with accurate information not only about what to expect, but also about the variability among individuals in regard to sexual development. Physicians, church leaders, and school counselors may provide you with assistance. Early and late bloomers, as well as the average child, need support and reassurance about their own "normalcy."

Some of the physical changes happen so quickly that the teen may be very awkward and clumsy. Sudden physical growth is <u>not</u> necessarily followed by a social and emotional growth spurt. The different facets of growth are not coordinated in a way that is logical and tidy! Adolescence is a time of great disorganization. As your child grapples with the many physical changes, there may be an increased inhibition about the body and a greater need for privacy. Attention to grooming and physical appearance may take wide swings. That is, the teen may be inordinately fixated on grooming one day and a total slob the next!

THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- This is often one of the most difficult periods of schooling. Students may be enrolled in larger, more complex schools than they were previously.
- There is more flexibility and opportunity for decision making at school. The adolescent is increasingly responsible for his/her own time and, ultimately, progress.
- Schools encourage independent thinking and the expression of personal opinion within the context of respect for the rights of others.
- Schools provide increased opportunity for interaction with the peer group. Activities, such as clubs, dances, and sports, help students develop physical, social, and intellectual skills.
- Teachers frequently make assignments which are designed to be completed over a period of days or weeks, rather than overnight. Higher level thinking skills, such as analysis and evaluation, may be stressed.

PARENTS CAN HELP

- Communicate to your child your support of school expectations about behavior and academic performance. Familiarize yourself with student handbooks, codes of behavior, the school calendar, course requirements, and the grading system.

- Whenever possible, give your teen the opportunity to express abstract ideas, to voice opinions about current events, and to react to social problems. Newspapers and magazines in the home can promote such discussion.

- Even though your teen may resist such efforts, try to establish a relationship with some of the school staff, either by phone or preferably through personal visits. Don't wait for a crisis or a report card to initiate this contact. Make it a practice to stay in touch so that doing so is routinely expected by both your child and the teacher.

- Provide the physical space and the opportunity for your teenager to organize time and complete school assignments. You can allow some freedom about where and when this studying takes place, but continue to monitor homework activities.

- Your child's questioning, rebelling, and searching activities, though characteristic of adolescence, may cause problems with adults at school. While not condoning or sanctioning unacceptable behavior, you may need to provide a "safe harbor" from stormy times at school. If the school punishes your child, you may want to consider whether additional punishment at home is necessary. If the problem is at school, let the school take the necessary measures. You can voice your support of the school's standards without adding to the punishment.

- It is not uncommon for teenagers to have difficulties with respect to drugs, alcohol, and perhaps their own sexuality. For some, this is simply a matter of experimentation, the thrill of the forbidden, or a badge of acceptance into the peer group. As a parent, you have the primary responsibility to provide information and to model your values. Schools have policies and programs which can assist you in providing information, as well as in setting limits and communicating expectations. Make yourself aware of what the school is doing to deal with drug and alcohol abuse prevention and sex education.

- Help ease the transition to junior or senior high school by encouraging participation in school activities. Athletics, clubs, and social events help bond the child to the school and ease some of the feelings of isolation prevalent at this age.

- Setting limits on behavior, such as curfews, often provides the support the young experimenting teen needs. Communicating with the parents of your child's friends is a helpful way to establish some uniform standards of the peer group.

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS: GRADES 10-12

In this period, some of the chaos of earlier adolescence begins to subside, however imperceptibly at times. The disengagement from parents and the bonding with the peer group may be more evident. Consequently, the teenager's need to function independently of the parent gradually is fulfilled. Many of the contradictions of adolescence, however, are still there; moods swing from gloom to giddiness and from callousness to sensitivity. Later adolescence is a time when the capacity for commitment, engagement, loyalty, and fidelity is explored.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

School for the older adolescent often poses some difficult challenges. Senior high schools tend to be large and, often, impersonal institutions. The student at this stage may have more privileges, such as an "off-campus" lunch, unassigned periods, etc., which allow the teen opportunity to develop responsibility for his/her time. Without self-discipline, however, this freedom can be problematic. The teen needs to have parents and teachers continue to set reasonable limits. He/she may need to be reminded of the personal accountability for decisions that affect school performance (e.g., attendance, completion of required assignments).

The educational experience during late adolescence is an opportunity for deepening interests and refining competence. Course work in senior high, especially near graduation, is more specialized; and students are expected to make critical decisions with respect to credits, electives, and requirements for graduation. Tests take on increased significance in that they may be used to establish the competence necessary for graduation, as well as for entry into other educational institutions after high school graduation. School counselors and other staff members who know your child can provide information and assistance.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The periods of adult-like behavior are increasing in frequency and duration. As the teen becomes more confident of the successful disengagement from family, self-esteem is more stable. With the development of independence and autonomy, the influence of peers begins to recede somewhat. In light of this, the older teen may begin to respond to parents and teachers as friends who have more varied experiences than do they.

The identity issues of early adolescence which focused on "Who am I?" take on a new tone. The issue now revolves around "How does this person who is ME fit into society? Where is my place?" The later adolescent is beginning to develop a concept of his/her social role and a sense of purpose and direction. The relationship with the community is expanding. Major developmental tasks are concerned with establishing intimacy and autonomy. Whereas the pivotal events of early adolescence were physical (puberty), this later adolescence is characterized by legal milestones, such as attaining rights to drive, vote, drink, and marry. The older teen is more tolerant of flaws in self and in others.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

The growth spurts have begun to slow down a bit and stabilize, and the teenager is probably a little more comfortable with his/her body. It is likely, however, that the teen faces decisions which affect the body, such as drugs, alcohol, and sexual activity.

THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- Students of this age increasingly are making their own decisions. Some of these decisions are in response to immediate needs, such as daily schedules and work routines; others are more long range, and may be related to career and college goals.

- School personnel, such as counselors and special teachers, can provide guidance and information about careers and additional education.

- Course work may provide an opportunity for greater specialization, increased competence, or the pursuit of special interests.

- Senior high school students become less dependent on the peer group and may begin to develop deeper relationships with adults.

PARENTS CAN HELP

- Late teens may experience a lot of anxiety about plans for life after high school. You can help by providing assistance, support, and information, and, especially, by listening.

- Continue to set limits that are reasonable and fair. Sometimes this is a source of security for teens, who are likely to be exposed to a vast array of choices of behavior that are overwhelming.

- You can assist older teens applying their organizational, planning, and academic skills to tasks, such as job applications or forms of admissions to institutions for further education or training.

- Although students should take primary responsibility, you, nevertheless, must keep in touch with certain critical matters, such as high school graduation requirements, important testing events, and college admissions.

- Mothers, as well as fathers, can share their own work experiences with their teens. If possible, you can arrange for them to make a career observation of you or family friends.

- Employment during high school provides an opportunity for teenagers not only to earn money, but also to learn work habits and possibly, a skill. Jobs can sometimes create conflicts with schoolwork and school activities, however. Parents may need to monitor the situation so that academic success does not suffer.

PARENTS AND EDUCATORS: ADDITIONAL PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES

PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Throughout the school year, there may be times when you have an opportunity to meet with your child's teacher. You may initiate these contacts on your own, or the school may set some times aside for parent-teacher conferences. Since time for both you and the teacher may be in short supply, it is important that you plan these meetings very carefully so your child realizes the most possible benefit.

Reasons to Schedule a Conference

- If you wish to meet the teacher, to see the classroom, and/or to find out about expectations, schedules, textbooks, etc.
- If you need to remove your child from class for a period of time.
- If you have moved recently and want to make that transition easier for your child.
- If you wish to find out more about your child's level of performance.
- If you have noticed that your child's grades have gone down.
- If you want to find out more about how your child interacts with other children.
- If your child never seems to have any homework.
- If you wish to share with the teacher any physical, emotional, or family problems your child may be experiencing.
- If your child's attitude toward school has changed for the worse.

Telephone Call to the School

If you call the school, it is unlikely that the teacher will be able to speak to you at that moment; so be prepared to leave a message for a call back. In this message, include the following: your name, your child's name, the specific reason for your call (in case the teacher needs to get information before calling back), and where you can be reached.

Preparation for the Conference

- Talk with your child about the conference, and find out if there are things your child thinks should be discussed.
- Examine your child's books and homework papers if you have not already done so.
- Write down some of your questions and concerns, and take the list with you to the conference.
- Ask about the skills and content taught during the current school year.
- Consider including the child in the conference. Try to make this a positive experience that allows your child to give or receive information or possibly even make a commitment. For example, an outcome of the conference might be that the student agrees to 30 more minutes studying each night in a particular subject.

Post-Conference Sharing

Share what happened at the conference with your child. Be sure to indicate at least one positive trait or behavior of your child that was discussed. For the areas needing improvement, you and the teacher might draw up a plan of action and/or agreement with your child. Sometimes it is helpful to set up a feedback system for supporting appropriate and successful learning. This might include a daily or weekly phone call or note from the teacher. Frequent feedback such as this allows parents to monitor the situation more closely and to reward the child at home for meeting goals at school. As the appropriate behavior increases, the notes and phone calls gradually can become less frequent.

SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Establish contact with your child's teacher early in the year -- even if there are no apparent problems.
- Share with the teacher your expectations for your child, and find out what the teacher expects.
- Avoid going to the school without first arranging an appointment. Interruptions in the classroom may cause the loss of valuable learning time.

TELEVISION

Television plays a major role in the lives of most children. In fact, it is estimated that by the time your child graduates from high school he/she has watched nearly 20,000 hours of TV! That is more time than is spent in school, so it is very important that you be aware of the quantity and quality of TV viewing. Help your child become a wise consumer of TV. Here are some tips:

- Set up a TV bank. Decide on a reasonable number of hours for your child to watch TV for the week. Then have your child decide on a daily or weekly basis how these hours will be spent. The specifics will vary, of course, depending on your child's age and level of maturity. This procedure will help your child develop skill at making decisions. It also will help ensure that TV is not just an afterthought or the easiest way to alleviate boredom.

- Make sure that the TV set is not just "noise" in the background while other activities take place. Turn it on for a specific program, and turn it off when the program is over.

- When possible, watch TV with your child, and talk about the program. Make TV a learning experience. Programs can reinforce reading lessons by developing skills, such as finding the main idea, interpreting and comprehending a story, predicting outcomes, and following sequence. For older children, TV can be used to further the development of critical thinking and to explore values.

- Monitor the quality of your child's TV viewing. Some studies have stressed the negative effects on young minds of programs exploiting sex and violence.

HOMEWORK

Homework gives your child the opportunity to practice, extend, and reinforce skills taught in school. Teachers rely on parents to exercise their partnership with the school by helping to make homework a productive experience. You can facilitate this in several ways:

- Decide on a regular time for homework. Work this out with your child after you have spoken to the teacher and determined approximately how much homework is required.

- Decide on a place that is comfortable, but quiet and equipped for work. Agree on how to handle phone calls.

- Don't get so involved that you take over the work! Be available for assistance and advice, but don't let the task become yours.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are involved in educating long before the child first attends school. In addition, while the child is in school, they continue to educate and enhance learning in many ways at home. Two other common avenues for parental involvement often are available, as well: 1) Support services, such as the PTA, parent association, grade mothers, school helpers, etc.; and 2) policy development and school improvement activities, such as school boards, school improvement teams, and school development activities.

Parental involvement in the school may include support services and social activities that contribute to a positive school climate and serve, perhaps, as fund raisers. This involvement functions in many positive ways. Children see their parents at the school and get the message that school and its activities are important. Educators have the opportunity to mix with parents in a relaxed atmosphere, which helps break down some of the barriers that may exist between them, and thus leads to more effective communication.

Parents also can be involved in helping set education policy and direction by participating in board elections, meetings, and perhaps even school development and improvement initiatives at individual schools. Educators recognize the unique contribution and perspective of parents and may ask for volunteers to work on plans for school improvement. This opportunity allows parents to be involved in the important work of setting goals and priorities for their children's education.

CONCLUSION

The goal of a healthy, happy, well-educated child is one shared by educators and parents. Reaching that goal takes a great deal of hard work by teachers, parents, and of course, students. Like an engine, when all the parts are working together, the vehicle moves forward.

The student, whether a first grader or a senior in high school, has an obligation to make the most of the schooling opportunity. Attendance, the development of good work habits, and respect for teachers and other students contribute significantly to making school a pleasant and productive experience.

Teachers and school administrators take pride in making a difference in the lives of their students. They strive to challenge children to stretch intellectually, socially, and emotionally; and they are best able to do this when they work in partnership with parents. Teachers want and need parents who are interested and involved.

The most important teacher your child will ever have, however, is YOU! As parents, you guide the development of values, character, and skills in language, math, and physical education long before your child starts school. Once your child is in school, moreover, you continue to have a tremendous impact on the quality of the education your child receives. By being an active, visible, informed member of the educational team, therefore, you help your child develop to the fullest extent possible.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL YEARS

ALERTA: A Multicultural Bilingual Approach to Teaching Young Children. L. Williams and Y. DeGaetano (1985) Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley.

All Our Children Learning. B. Bloom (1981) New York: McGraw-Hill.

Between Parent and Child: New Solutions to Old Problems. H. Ginott (1965). New York: Macmillan.

Parent's Survival Tips. Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect. (Call 1-800-THE KIDS).

P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training. T. Gordon (1970). New York: Wyden Books.

What Did You Learn in School Today? A Comprehensive Guide to Getting the Best Possible Education for Your Child. B. Baron, C. Baron and B. MacDonald (1983). New York: Warner Books.

JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

All Our Children Learning. B. Bloom (1981). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Between Parent and Teenager. H. Ginott (1969). New York: Macmillan.

Challenges: A Young Man's Journal for Self-Awareness and Personal Planning. M. Bingham, J. Edmondson and S. Stryker (1984). Santa Barbara, CA: Advocacy Press.

Choices: A Teen Woman's Journal for Self-Awareness and Personal Planning. M. Bingham, J. Edmondson and S. Stryker (1984). Santa Barbara, CA: Advocacy Press.

How to Live (Almost) Happily With a Teenager. L. Davitz and J. Davitz (1982). Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press.

Parent's Survival Tips. Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect. (Call 1-800-THE KIDS).

P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training. T. Gordon (1970). New York: Wyden Books.

Teenagers Themselves. H. Spanogle, Editor (1984). New York: Adama Books.

Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence. J. Kagen and R. Coles (1972). New York: Norton Books.

PARENTS AS PARTNERS WITH THE SCHOOL

How to Help Your Children Achieve in School. (1984). Pueblo, CO: Consumer Information Center.

How to Make Your Child a Winner. (1984). Chicago, Ill: Encyclopedia Britannica.

Parents... Partners in Education. K. Amundson (1982). Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Partners: Parents and Schools. R. Brandt, Editor (1979). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

READER FEEDBACK FORM

HELP AT HOME FOR LEARNING IN SCHOOL

Please rate this document on each of the following points. Your frank evaluation will help us to continue to provide useful and practical educational products.

Your Professional Judgement

1. Does the document provide a knowledgeable and practical review of parents' roles and concerns in helping children with home-learning and school support?

   _____ Yes _____ No

2. This document contains many suggestions for parents in helping their children. How would you grade suggestions in terms of helpfulness to parents? Please circle your grade for each part.

   (scale: A=Excellent B=Good C=Fair D=Poor E=Unacceptable).

Early Elementary Years	A	B	C	D	E
Middle Elementary Years	A	B	C	D	E
Later Elementary Years	A	B	C	D	E
Junior High Years	A	B	C	D	E
Senior High Years	A	B	C	D	E
Additional Partnership Activities	A	B	C	D	E

Feedback from Parents

1. If these materials have been distributed to parents, what has been the response?

   _____ Positive _____ Negative _____ No trend _____ No response

   Comment:

2. What is the evidence of parent use of or reaction to the document?

_____Discussion at PTA Meeting
_____Calls or letters
_____Newspaper coverage
_____Other:

Comments:

Return to: New Jersey State Department of Education
Student Behavior and Development Unit
Division of General Academic Education
225 West State Street, CN 500
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